

15 Nov 1961

Vietnam War Evaluation Being Made for Johnson

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

A high-level evaluation of the military situation in Vietnam is being prepared for the President by an inter-agency group. It coincides with a visit to Washington by

Ellsworth Bunker, United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, and Gen. William C. Westmoreland, commander of United States forces there, who is due in Washington today.

Every indicator — from the price of rice to the number of Vietcong defectors — is being studied in an intensive effort to determine the degree of progress being made, Washington informants said yesterday.

The evaluation, under the general direction of George Carver of the Central Intelligence Agency, is to be in the President's hands by Jan. 1. Presumably, the data will be used in the President's messages to Congress and in addresses to the nation next year.

Tangible Evidence Sought

Officers familiar with the survey said they were convinced that considerable progress had been made in Vietnam and that the evaluation was an attempt to produce tangible evidence of it. Most high-ranking military men in Washington dispute the assertion that the war has become a stalemate.

What Washington terms "the Vietnam indicators" apparently demonstrate some improvement

in the South Vietnamese Army's effectiveness, particularly in the Mekong Delta region and along the demilitarized zone. The strength and morale of the enemy forces appear to have deteriorated, but not much, according to one informant.

The number of battles has increased in recent months, but the ratio of allied to enemy combat deaths varies—as it has in past months—between 1 to 3.8 and 1 to 5.6. The informants said it was too early to draw any conclusions from the survey.

High-level sources agreed, however, that, whatever the survey's conclusions, the war would be affected by command changes, budgetary problems and domestic political questions during 1968, a Presidential election year.

Command Change Seen

Gen. Westmoreland is expected to complete his tour in Vietnam, after four years there, before summer. Gen. Harold K. Johnson, the Army's Chief of Staff, will have served in that position for four years in July. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams Jr., deputy commander in Vietnam, is expected to succeed General Westmoreland.

General Westmoreland is highly regarded by his military superiors in Washington, and his enthusiasm, energy and leadership are valued in Saigon. However, some middle-grade military men in Washington believe that four years of a wearing war is enough for any general and that a new commander might provide a new perspective.

The general has been characterized as a "theater commander with more responsibility and less authority than any in our history," and the restrictions placed upon him have contributed to some frustrations.

During the visit of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara to Saigon in July, some press reports indicated that the Secretary felt that more effective use might be made of United States troops in Vietnam, and that the proportion of combat to support troops should be increased.

The implication of criticism of General Westmoreland, though later disavowed, was regarded by military sources as another evidence of the wide differences of opinion between the Secretary of Defense and many of his military commanders.

Mr. McNamara, for instance, is said to support a pause in the bombing of North Vietnam during the winter, though such a pause is strenuously opposed by the military.

Adm. U. S. Grant Sharp, commander of United States forces in the Pacific, will reach the retirement age of 62 in April. General Westmoreland is under his over-all command, and Admiral Sharp has directed the bombing of North Vietnam.

The Army and Air Force have advocated that the top command post in the Pacific be rotated among the services. So far it has always been filled by an admiral.

General Westmoreland, or some other officer, could be appointed to the post, but some observers believe that to avoid service recriminations in an election year, the President is more likely to appoint a naval officer or to keep Admiral Sharp on active duty.

Other Changes Likely

Besides the shifts in Vietnam, there may be a number of other changes in top military commands in the coming months.

Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will finish his second two-year term in July, and his health has not been good.

Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization commander in Europe is 68 years old and will probably be relieved next year after six years in office.

The problems of financing a war that costs about \$2.5-billion a month have been complicated by the differences between the Administration and Congress about a tax increase and budget reductions. Some military men are concerned at the increasing cost of new weapons, which they attribute in part to inflation. One of them said, "We'll be in the soup if we have to struggle with more price increases just at this juncture."

The President indicated earlier this year that he did not wish to ask the next session of Congress for a supplemental appropriation for the fighting in Vietnam, and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara has been trying to defer or

eliminate projects for which as much as \$2-billion has been authorized in the current budget.

Final decisions have not been made, but informants said that even production of tactical aircraft and helicopters would probably be affected. The tentative deferrals or cuts have stirred Congressional interest and some opposition.

Even if the cuts are made, some military men doubt that the war can be financed without another supplemental appropriation for this fiscal year. They point out that troop strength in Vietnam is to increase to 525,000 by July 1.

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Original filed under

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N.Y. Times
15 November 1961